Talk of the Town

Mumbai is an exciting place for journalists

In 1969, as a trainee journalist with the *Times* group, my first assignment with the *Illustrated Weekly of India* was supervised by a young woman sub-editor, who had just graduated out of the training department. I was impressed by her clear thinking. She knew exactly what she wanted from me in the article. This person would go places, I thought to myself. Bachi KNF (now Karkaria) graduated from the *Weekly* to hold senior positions in *The Statesman* and the *Times of India* before joining the *Mid-Day* group as editorial director. We had been in touch off and on. On her last day in *The Times*, busy answering telephone calls and cleaning up her cabin, Bachi agreed for a long chat. The subject? Journalism.

INTERVIEW

By V Gangadhar

- **Is the parting with the *Times* sad, friendly?**

Well, I worked here for 20 years in two stages. In a way I am sad to leave the place. Yes, it was a friendly parting. The management made tempting offers to hold me back. But I foresee a more exciting career at the Mid-Day.

- **From a highly successful, internationally-acclaimed paper you are going to a successful, young, Mumbai-based tabloid. Why?**

Mid-Day, *as you mentioned is focussed on Mumbai. And Mumbai is an amazing city where so many things happened. Mid-Day has given me total freedom to focus more on Mumbai. As the features editor,* Sunday Times of India, Sunday Review *and editor,* Special Projects *I had specialised in covering the infrastructure, problems and hopes of cities. I had done this with the Times editions in Bangalore and Ahmedabad and this approach helped to put them at the top.* Mid-Day *offered more scope to utilise this expertise.*

- ***The Times* had a sluggish start in Bangalore. How did you bring it to the top?**

Yes, it was at the bottom, way behind Deccan Herald *and the* Indian Express. *The creative energy and new ideas were there, but I guess I acted as a catalyst. Bangaloreans did not care that the* Times *was a national daily, they wanted a paper which would reflect their own views, dreams and ambitions. You see, when we started, the city was undergoing a great shift, from being the garden city of pensioners to a throbbing global city. Certain old, traditional values were fast disappearing and this alarmed senior citizens. We positioned* Times of India *as a paper for the future, yet respecting the traditions of the city. I think we helped to bridge the past with the present and the future.*

- **Was that enough to make the paper a success?**

That was the beginning. At the macro level, The Times *began to identify and solve local problems. In our local 'Wide Angle-Bangalore' page, we featured civic problems, the official stand on these and the likely solutions as suggested by an outsider. This approach, besides helping to solve the problems, brought the paper closer to the readers.*

- **Had you tried this technique before?**

Yes, at the Statesman, *Calcutta, where I was the first woman assistant editor. They did not know what to do with me and I began to handle the 'pothole journalism' beat. Water problems, power shortage, transport, the running of the Metro, were all taken up in detail. The local reporting became very strong and totally involved. People wrote thanking us for reviving their faith in the city.*

- **I guess the 'Think Local' theme is now more important than before.**

Certainly. All the papers are following this trend, including The Times. *So for me, going to a paper like* Mid-Day *is the right move, at the right time.*

- **You are designated as the 'Editorial Director'. What does that mean?**

I was already an editor with the Times *and going to another paper with the same designation was not much of a change. Tariq Ansari of the* Mid-Day *came up with this wonderful offer. At* Mid-Day *I will be part of the Strategic Core Group, promoting the paper, FM radio and on-line programmes. This type of job did not exist anywhere in Indian journalism. I also felt I had done everything I could at the* Times *and was getting a bit restless.*

- **Would you agree with the view that editors were being downgraded in the profession?**

That is too general a statement. You see, journalism is changing fast. The classical editor sitting on his lofty pedestal, may feel a bit a bit uncomfortable. But today, we have to give a readers what they wanted. News coverage and presentation were being democratised.

- **I see quite often such news coverage leading to frivolity.**

You see, this is an ongoing process and mistakes are bound to be made. It may take sometime to achieve a sophisticated presentation. But why not cover entertainment, education and other beats more extensively? The 'Canteen Talk' in colleges cannot be dismissed as frivolous. Today's students are interested in serious issues like environment, jobs, careers and even politics. Give the readers all these along with coverage of arts, theatre, food, cinema and so on. Why keep a closed mind? Why patronise young readers?

- **You are often mentioned as a member of the celebrity circuit!**

(laughs): When I was associated with Bombay Times *I felt I had to be out there and you can say my 'celebrity status' began then. But it is always possible to be part of it, yet maintain a distance. Be detatched. Don't forget that among those who were partying, were men and women who slogged hard to make Mumbai what it is today. Mumbai is not all a party circuit, there are other aspects to the city. Everyone in Mumbai wants to be climbing the ladder of success. This is what we intend to highlight in* Mid-Day.

- **This celebrity status coupled with the constant wordplay in your writings tends to overshadow your contribution in other areas of journalism. I mean, like your writings on AIDS.**

As one rose in the profession, there was more and more of administrative work and less time for field reporting. This can't be helped. I often wished I could be out more often, writing stories. As for the wordplay, you don't see it in my serious writings. It was useful while writing the humorous third edits in the Times, *mind you, I don't use puns for the sake of puns. I remember one very senior editor telling others, "In Bachi's case it was not a case of wordplay for wordplay's sake. It was more of an association of ideas." I appreciated that comment. To me, wordplay comes naturally, most of the times. It had also spawned plenty of imitators.*

- **Tell me something about your most memorable moments in journalism.**

My meeting with the Dalai Lama. He was so simple and down to earth in his views. I also cherished the experience of working with Khushwant Singh at the Weekly. *He taught us what journalism was all about and brought the* Weekly *back to the earth. We learnt to write without cliches, spent more time in writing captions than others did while writing entire articles! It was a great learning experience.*

Bachi Karkaria... For me, going to a paper like Mid-Day is the right move and at the right time.

- **What is this feeling of insecurity among the *Times* journalists?**

I strongly feel if you had talent and ambition, no one can stop you. Why should such people feel demoralised? In any organisation, it is only those who lacked talent and confidence who complained. Today, in the Times *the walls which had surrounded the editorial department had come down. There is now a better, mutual appreciation of each other's work. If the marketing people can contribute something to the editorial, they are welcome. At the same time, the paper had never stooped to the level of covering and carrying news influenced by the ads it carried. Editors would never allow this.*

- **One final question. *Mid-Day* has no competition. There is a feeling it has peaked.**

But look at the population of Mumbai! Oh, there is tremendous scope for progress. We have no competition, but only contemporaries.

A Sunday su

SEEING

Uma Mah

CLICKING on something randomly while brow
pleasantly surprised to find that we had won tw
Sunday morning. We saw *The Insider* in a m
cinema. In this film based on a real story, A
himself — haggard and intense, very watchable
Bergman, producing *Sixty Minutes*, the televisi
But it was Russell Crowe who was so very inte
playing Jeffrey Wigand, a senior research scient
severed - eased out - of his job at a hug
manufacturing company, because he had asked
that is what the film is about - it tells the stor
family, a house, a golf hobby - and a problem.
the unscrupulous methods that the tobacco com
using - ARE using, to promote nicotine add
confidentiality agreement. A lot of heartsearch
decisions, etc. A rather ironic vignette showin
companies all getting up together and testifying
not believe nicotine is addictive. And a resear
that cigarettes are the delivery device for this drug. A media conglomerate that's hellbent on not screening the episqde. Or, if they must screen it, on diluting its impact.
It's at once heartwarming and chilling to realise
media has on our perception of issues. Many i
interesting film that centres around the slow co
around him as he sticks to his decision to tel
film's weaknesses show up, however, is in its f
Wigand's breaking marriage, his growing fears
its absence of shades of grey in the Bergman (P
Somehow at the end of this Michael Mann (
Mohicans) film, one felt a bit - the American w
at the predictableness of it all, the bad guys ve
crisis of conscience, the simplistic and very c
breaking marriage, the moments that aspire to s
script felt so much more formulaic and less su
been. Editing was slack, even loose - slow cam
grass and golf parks didn't really add much to th
movies always have to have bad guys, and now
been deep-sixed, they've turned their cameras
and the tobacco companies. So much for "bold
that jazz, and it's good to see Hollywood taking
there are more devils within the human mind t
see.

On the other hand, the Fassbinder retrospec
by the Max Mueller Bhavan this month concern
human mind as with outside battles. 1945-born
Rainer Werner Fassbinder, dying young in
overdose, is recognised as one of the most inter
minds of Europe. And yet, an oeuvre of 44 fi
plays and much poetry. My personal favourit
post-war trilogy, tales of Germany, *Die Ehe d*
with the amazing Hanna Schygulla, and then *L*
Voss (1982). Sixteen films are being screene
part of the package. Definitely not to be misse
go to see Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth* again?
Blanchett's energetic and hotblooded performa
shorn heads and men and women burning at the s
and random angles from behind grills and s
okay, we knew it's to do with intrigues. Not for Rich
and the Eliza
silly and superfluous. Perhaps, yes, for that f
Gielgud, so marvelous as always. Not for the
revelry, the pageantry, the exhausting noisiness

Talented teenaged singer

BY VIJAY SHANKAR

Teenage singer Sreelekha

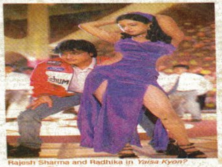
THE talented teenaged singer is Sreelekha N. Namboodiri who incidentally has won the first prize on TV channel Asianet's *Colgate Total Sa Re Ga Ma* singing contest, which was telecasted last week. Sreelekha has also appeared in Asianet's *Yuvaprathiba* in its *Suprabhatam* programme. Hearty Congrats! Sreelekha is the youngest daughter of the Namboodiris living in Nerul, Navi Mumbai. Sreelekha is fortunate to be born in a family whose members are not only lovers of music but firmly believe that young singers talent should be nurtured properly, so that is can really bloom and grow to spread fragrance and harmony everywhere. Sreelekha took to the arts as a tiny tot and has now already completed a seven year course in Bharata Natyam and five year course in carnatic music. Sreelekha says, "Though music is my first love and dance my second, that does not mean that I will neglect my studies." Sreelekha has just appeared for her 12th exams. Sreelekha sings in various languages with confidence and with a commendable voice. She has been singing classical, light and film songs and has son over 150 prizes in various competitions organised by different organisations in Mumbai, Navi Mumbai and Thane districts. Sreelekha has sung regularly for New Bombay Keraleeya Samajam's musical orchestra and children's orchestra known as Madhura Swarangal. Sreelekha aspires to become a playback singer. Best of Luck!

MRIDANGAM MAESTRO

'MRIDANGA Vidwan' T.S. Nandkumar is measure with a difference. He is not only an excellent Mridangam player but a teacher as well who has students always flocking around him.

Nandkumar with his musical ensemble performed recently in New York. Winner of several titles and awards, Nandkumar has been promoting and propating Indian classical music for more than two decades now, both as a performer and teacher as well. Recently, his students performed at the Music Triangle programme in Khar which was well appreciated. He has had the privilege of performing for various festivals all over the country, besides giving performances for AIR and Doordarshan.

As a performing artist, he has the ability to sustain the interest of the audience through intelligent rhythmic forays. He is the leading light of the percussion ensemble, 'Vadya Laya Vrinda'. Last year, Nandkumar established TSN's Percussive Arts Centre. He says, "Though there are several institutions for imparting training in vocal and instrumental music and dance, there is no institution, for which offers exclusive and specialised training in 'Avanadha Vadyas' (percussion instruments). Also the number of artists associated with the 'avanadha vadyas' is dwindling mainly due to lack of proper training facilities. With a view to bridge this gap, ESN's Percussive Arts Centre in Mumbai has emerged as the forerunner in the promotion of fine arts. This institution plans to explore rhythm and form ensembles of percussive artistes".


Rajesh Sharma and Radhika in *Yaisa Kyon?*

ACTOR RAJESH SHARMA

AFTER successful participation in *Himmatwala*, young and dashing Rajesh Sharma makes his appearance as the leading actor in Kailash Art Internationals Hindi feature film *Yaisa Kyon?*. The story line is interesting as it features as to how a young innocent man becomes a victim to circumstances.

According to director B.B. Sinha, 'Rajesh is a well equipped actor'. Rajesh is casted opposite actress Radhika. Produced by K.C. Sharma, the main artists of this film are Raja Murad, Johny Lever, Sudhir Dalvi, Harjesh, Mohan Joshi, Anil Dhawan, Ananth Mahadevan, Avtar Gill, Jagdish, Ram Mohan and Razzak Khan.

Story by Vidur Kamal Nayan, Dialogues by Sashi Raj, Lyrics by Dev Kohli, music by Ram Lakshman, Cameraman Kaushal-Meses, Sound by Thomas Varghese, Choreography by Habiba Rehman and editing is by Yukub Khan.

Mouth-watering dish
the Punjab Food Fe

By Gita Hari

PUNJAB it conjures images of lush, green fields and clear, blue skies. Golden ca
swaying in the breeze. Hearty sons of the soil quaffing thick creamy *lassi* with fluffy
tandoor. And now, Kandahar brings you the ambrosial cuisine of this scenic land of t
Punjab Food Festival from 9-19th March.
The people of Punjab are known for their love of good food. Eating is considered a
priority over everything else. So much so, that the entrepreneurial Punjabi has sh
creative cooking in eateries the world over, earning Punjab the distinction of being kn
of India'. No wonder then, that this region has produced cuisine which is rich in flavour and variety. The menu at Kandahar will reflect this variety by offering more than just *sarson da saag te makki di rot* popularly associated with Punjabi fare. Instead feast on exotic delicacies like *Murgh Tikka Kandahari*, the house speciality, (boned cubes of chicken, steeped in a marinade of royal cumin-enriched cream, cheddar, garlic and a hint of coriander, glazed in the tandoor) or *Murgh Kibti* — (a rare dish of chicken cooked without water, prepared with yoghurt, coriander and turmeric, powdered with saffron). For the vegetarians there's *Makhaneywalla Chholia*, (lotus puffs cooked with green gram in gingery turmeric-tinged yoghurt
gravy prepared with coriander and pepper), or *Ranjitashahi Paneer*, (batons of pan
paneer bhurjee, cooked in fresh tomato puree, accented with saffron and drizzled with
with a sweet tooth, you can choose from the famous *Gajrela* (carrot halwa with almo
(the celestial dessert of rice, milk khoya and malai, garnished with pistachio, almon
with *gulaabjal*) or *Khasta Pinni* — widely regarded as the most nutritious confecti
'energy bomb' is served with *malai*. So, come to Kandahar during The Punjab Foo
March and pay homage to the wonderful cuisine from The Land of Plenty!

Sugar'n'Spice

By Coffee & Toffee Vaswani

WORLD Commonwealth Day was last week, and the Western Zone Unit had organised an interactive panel discussion to commemorate this day. Among the privileged few who witnessed the event, we were right at home and honoured to be included in the gathering comprising eminent media and business personalities, as well as consular corps the topic of dissection and discussion was communications in the present age, with relevant questions and answers flying fast and furious.

FACING the barrage of queries were Shekhar Gupta of the *Indian Express* David Frencham, Consul of Australia, Michael Bates-British Deputy High Commissioner, Sam Balsara of Madison Advertising and Mohini Mathur, the ultra dynamic and energetic lady who had put together the entire evening. Moderating the engrossing debate was Suma Varghese, the perfect buffer between the two sides. So interesting was the exchange that it exceeded the time allocated for it and it had to be ended. We ourselves have a few words pending with Mr. Shekhar Gupta hope we have the opportunity soon.

THE opportunity to chat with two of the other panelists was much welcome the gentlemen being Michael Bates and David Frencham. The latter for his interesting array of travel relates anecdotes and the former, for remembering our faces. Now that's unusual, certainly!

THE high team following the formal function featured some very animated conversations and delectable snacks, enjoyed tremendously by the gathering. Speaking of which, that included apart from the panelists, the consul general of Mauritius and Malta, Havovi and Godrej Dotiwala of the Indo-Australian Society, businessman A. Syed, Pramod Shah of the Lions Club and a host of like-minded intellectual individuals. A wonderful evening, all credit due to Mohini Mathur, ravishing in a chic black and red saree. And never mind that we will left much, much later than we had anticipated doing so.

LATE is something we are quality of, having omitted to mention a book received last week. One of us, Coffee, specifically, received a volume from Leslie Chan of the Singapore Tourism Board on account of being a woman achiever. The book is a comprehensive guide to Singapore's myriad attractions, complete with details and little surprises, even a make-believe little lantern. This seems to be the year for a trip to Singapore, and this book has only served to whet our appetites some more. If we get there well let you know, in the meantime, Thank You, Leslie Chan!

STAR World now has competition, dauntingly so. From Subhashchandra Goyal's stable of satellite channels come another two-Zee English and Zee Movies in English. The news was announced midweek at a gathering restricted to members of the media, followed by a party at the Taj. The Taj management is rather ingenious, for, now that the old Shamiana has relocated, the space thus vacated is utilised for parties such as this. Mr. Goyal, announcements completed left rather soon, leaving senior Zee executives to make very at the party.

AS the bash got under way, the Zee staff at the entrance became rather relaxed. And that was the we for a drunken lout to gate-crash after which the man drank some more once inside and then proceeded to harass a couple of young girls who were accompanying each other. Sadly, this happened in the presence of another, rather lame group of people who continued their merrymaking without batting an eyelash. The only person who came forward to venture a look was a girl from the group who went right back to having fun after an amused glance at the two girls trying to fend off the drunkard. For shame, human decency, chivalry etc. are just confined to being words in a dictionary these days. As for the Zee staffers, hey guys, maybe you could be more particular about the kind of people walking in at your parties in the future.

UNPLEASANT stuff
sure are innovative. All
channel came package in th
tucked into a faux-leather
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like to wish everyone a ve
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please make it a point not
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KEEP enjoying, see y

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